

Mitraux—Ethnology of Easter Island

19

Of the three domesticated animals of the Polynesians, only fowls were brought to Easter Island or else they alone survived to the time of European discovery. In 1722, there were neither pigs nor dogs, though Behrens (18, vol. 1, p. 131) tells us that the natives who boarded Roggeveen's ship "seemed to be acquainted with pigs." His statement may be inaccurate, but it is not unlikely that the natives did remember pigs. Pigs are mentioned in Mangarevan traditions and, according to history, the last sow was killed and eaten there in the seventeenth century. When pigs were reintroduced to Easter Island, they were called *oru*, probably an onomatopoeic name. Dogs are termed *paihenga*, and the usual Polynesian name for dog (*kuri*) applies to cats. 231 ●

The small, long-legged, indigenous fowls seem to have been less numerous before European contact than afterwards. Cook (53, vol. 1, p. 288) and La Pérouse (130, vol. 1, p. 76) stress their scarcity. The great value given to this bird in the social and economic life of the islanders upholds this impression in spite of G. Forster's statement (83, p. 157) to the contrary. Fowls must have multiplied in the second half of the last century for in 1882 they are said to have been extremely numerous over the entire island in a wild or semi-wild state. Geiseler (87, p. 37) estimates that there were 10,000 chickens at the time of his visit. 235

Today there are no wild fowls, but chickens are abundant in Hanga-roa and the natives are prodigal of eggs. When the ancient culture was functioning, chickens were the usual gifts to people who must be honored; they were raised for feasts and appear as a favorite motif in art. The feathers were used in making circlets, eyeshades, and hats. The economic value that chickens once had for the natives is manifest in the care they took of them. Near the sites of most ancient villages or settlements, hen houses are found. Often they are the only testimony of the former existence of a village. One officer under Gonzalez says that "the islanders breed fowls in little ruins scraped out in the ground and thatched over" (90, p. 122). [43] [237]

The only indigenous mammal was the Polynesian rat which has since been exterminated by rats from the ships. In former days the natives ate rats; Cook (53, vol. 1, p. 288) guesses that they did, and his supposition is borne out by references to the practice in legends. Present natives remember seeing old men eat rats. However, the following tale shows that certain persons were prejudiced against rats and did not consider them a delicacy: 136 262

The girl Kava-komari was brought up and grew. She lived in seclusion in her house, where she daily painted her face red and anointed herself with sugar-cane juice. One year she went to a *koro* (feast). All the men admired her. She lived in the *koro* house. Her father took her a bundle of rats and sweet potatoes to accompany the rats (*inaki*). She opened the bundle and saw the rats. The other girls laughed at her. She asked, "Why do you laugh about the rats?" The other girls answered, "We laugh because you are about to eat the rats." The girl said, "Rats are not bad food. Rats are good. We are like calabashes with the mouth below. There below is something ugly with us. Rats are clean. When you defecate it always falls down."

372 the island. Sheep dung was also used. In ancient times, when the population was far more dense, the fuel problem must have been serious. Yet the natives did not seem to worry about it. Cook (53, vol. 1, p. 292) saw twelve fires burning at the same place morning and evening. Natives burned the straps or tops of sugar cane, plantain heads, and probably branches from the numerous shrubs scattered about the island.

OVEN

354 Before the introduction of European cooking utensils, natives cooked (*oolu*) all their food in underground ovens (*umu*), similar to those in other parts of Polynesia. Wherever remains of settlements are found there are ancient ovens also.

801 The ovens are pentagonal in shape, formed of five slabs, generally curbs taken from some house. The slabs are buried in the ground to varying depths and project only 10 or 15 cm. above the surface enclosing a space 2 feet in diameter. My principal informant called my attention to the fact that the stones of the ovens always numbered five or seven and that an odd number of stones was imposed by superstition. I noticed only one oven with six slabs on the island. A screen or covered roof protected the oven from the wind (130, vol. 2, p. 256). This type of oven is no longer used.

Modern natives make earth ovens only when they are in camp or preparing a banquet.

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252 A hole about 2 feet deep is dug, on the bottom of which are placed large stones covered with grass. On this first layer, stones the size of the fist are piled up in a heap with small branches, scraps of wood (*hukahuka*) and grass. Fire is set to the pile (*ka te umu* or *puhi te umu*). The glowing stones are evenly fitted (*uru*) and spread with two sticks handled like tongs. The food—meat, sweet potatoes, yams, taro—is placed (*tao*) in the oven on banana or ti leaves to prevent burning. More hot stones are spread against or above (*puapua*) the leaves protecting the food. Formerly bundles were covered (*pengopengo*) with grass (*tanere*), today with a sack. Soil is shoveled (*tanu hai oone*) over the pit. After 2 hours the food is generally considered sufficiently cooked and is removed (*maoa*). To cook food well is *kukohope a te umu*. The entrails of the animals are roasted (*hatui*) on the glowing stones of the *umu*.

PREPARATION OF FOOD

252 Cooked food is never pounded on Easter Island, and probably never was in the past, since no food pounders have ever been found there. Breadfruit and taro are the staples in other parts of Polynesia and are mashed. Breadfruit does not grow on Easter Island and taro is far less important in diet than sweet potatoes which are never pounded. Pounding food requires a great deal of water and water has always been scarce on Easter Island.

231 Formerly the natives were reluctant to shed the blood of any animal. This may have had a religious background but it is more probable that the natives simply did not want to waste any blood. Chickens were strangled by twisting the neck; larger animals, such as goats and dogs, were suffocated by burying the head in a hole or in smoke. The hair was then singed and, with-

TO EASTER ISLAND.

101

The island extends to about 50 miles in circumference; [131]
 but no harbour capable of affording shelter to a single vessel of moderate burthen was met with. The whole of the shore-line is beset with reefs, cliffs, and rough ground, without containing any spot fit to beach a boat at. On penetrating inland in a few places they met with many natives, with whom they held intercourse, and they observed in them the same manners, customs, and ceremonies as in those of this bay; experiencing among them the same disposition to theft. They saw no kind of wild nor domestic animal, excepting hens and some rats. The fields are uncultivated save some small plots of ground, in which they sow beds of *yuca*, yams, sweet potatoes, and several plantations of plantains and sugar-cane: but all very tasteless, as if from want of cultivation. They did not find any metal, nor any ornaments of that kind in the natives' habitations. All this account tallies with the observations we have gathered in this bay, on whose slopes, and on those throughout the island, not a single tree is to be found capable of furnishing a plank so much as six inches in width; but there are plenty of shrubs or brushwood of a sort little more than an *estada*¹ in height, which offer little obstruction to one in passing as they are not dense and have no prickles. Its trees are very similar to mimosas and tamarinds. Of fruit-bearing trees I have seen only some very small figs, but so different from ours that they are recognisable as such only by the scent of the leaf, and the white juice which exudes from them. It is certain that they bear fruit, because the natives were eating some dry figs on board, which we gave them from those of Mendoza, and they called them *gecōy*. The island is destitute of every kind of bird: not a single bird has been

¹ An *estadal* or *estada* is equivalent to four *varas* of about 33 inches each, i.e. 11 feet.

574

A VOYAGE ROUND THE WORLD.

1774.
MARCH.X175
609

with a musket in his hand, but very justly reflected, that so slight a crime did not deserve the punishment of a leaden bullet.

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137

In our walk along the sea-shore, we discovered a few stalks of the same species of celery which is plentiful on the beaches of New Zealand, and we also found two other little plants common to that country. Whether these plants originally existed on the island, or sprung up from seeds, which the current of the sea, or birds by their plumage might transport from the opposite side of the ocean, I cannot venture to determine. We likewise met with a plantation

[244]

of yams (*dioscorea alata*, Linn.) which in so poor a flora as that of Easter Island was a great addition. The great cor-

X175

● 231

respondence in the features, customs, and languages of these people, to those of other natives of the South Sea islands, gave us some room to hope for such domestic animals among them, as we had observed at Taheitee or New Zealand. But notwithstanding the most diligent search, we never met with any other than common fowls, which were of a very small breed, and had a dull plumage. It is true we observed also two or three noddies, which were so tame as to settle on the shoulders of the natives, but from these individuals we could not conclude, that they kept a regular breed of them.

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About sun-set we left the watering-place, and walked to the cove where our boat lay at a grapnel. In our way we passed

tireless, anxious to please, and ready at all times, day or night, to do our bidding. Two of them, Laka and Huki, were especially useful to us. The latter was the more intelligent of the two, and was remarkably well informed regarding everything pertaining to the island. He knew the name of every point, headland, bay, etc., and his replies to our questions were given without hesitancy and so correctly, as we found by testing him, that he frequently surprised us. The writer obtained much information from him, and might have gained much more, regarding the native plants, insects, shells, etc., but unfortunately our interpreter, who had been but a short time on the island, was practically useless as a medium between us, and to understand each other's meaning was therefore most difficult. Owing to this fact, the want of facilities and conveniences for collecting and preserving specimens, and the absence of works of reference, but little could be accomplished in the particulars above mentioned.

A source of great annoyance to us during our trip was the hordes of flies which kept us company on the march, and then whenever we approached camp in the evening were greeted and cordially welcomed by other hordes which had been in previous possession of the locality. Many of the islands of the South Pacific are noted for the swarms of flies which infest them, one Rairoa, having been named by the navigator Schouten, 1616, Vliegen Islands by reason of the myriads which assailed and finally drove him to sea.

Another, and in some respects even worse plague, was the fleas, which had their origin in the numerous dogs kept on the island.

One more source of discomfort, in connection with our stay at the hospitable residence of Mr. Salmon, was the host of cockroaches which swarmed every part of the premises, measuring 2 or more inches in length, with antennae to correspond, and furnished with wings of a beautiful glistening brown.

TOPOGRAPHY.

From the most reliable information obtainable it appears that the ancient name of the island was *Te Pito te henua*. Referring to the vocabulary it will be seen that the word *Pito*, in Rapa Nui signifies *navel*, and *henua*, the *utero*. What association of ideas could have prompted these appellations it is, of course, difficult to imagine at the present day. The following speculations, which have occurred to the writer, are given for what they may be worth. The island is distinctly of volcanic origin, and on nearly all the hills and mountains the craters are clearly traceable, most markedly and startlingly so in the case of Rana Kao, at the southwest end. As will be seen, the craters of both volcanoes (all on the island are now extinct) are of great depth, with lakes of water at their bottoms. In the cases of the other volcanoes the craters are much more shallow, symmetrical, more evenly rounded, overgrown with grass, present a very striking and beautiful appear-

GONZALEZ, COOK, LA PÉROUSE 208

There is the same story of the native powers of appropriating the goods of the strangers. Cook says that they were "as expert thieves as any we had yet met with," and Pérouse, whose own hat they stole while helping him down one of the image platforms, is particularly aggrieved at such conduct, considering that he has given them sheep, goats, pigs, and other valuable presents; peace was only kept between the crew and the natives by official compensation being given the seamen for their lost property. 648

Here, however, the resemblance of these accounts with that of Roggeveen ends. The descriptions which are given by these later expeditions of the state of the country, and its facilities as a port of call, are very different from those of the Dutchmen. The Spaniards speak of it as being uncultivated save for some small plots of ground. The Englishmen are the reverse of enthusiastic. Forster calls it a "poor land," and Cook says that "no nation need contend for the honour of the discovery of this island, as there can be few places which afford less convenience for shipping." "Poultry" now consists of only a "few tame fowls"—later still we find that only one is produced. Pérouse, although he is not so depressed as Cook, tells us that only one-tenth of the land is cultivated. With regard to the population Roggeveen gives no number, and probably was not in a position to do so. The estimates made by the Spanish and English are very similar. Gonzalez puts it at nine hundred to one thousand, Cook at seven hundred; both of them, however, state that the number of women seen seemed to be disproportionately small. La Pérouse, writing of course some years later, speaks of the number as two thousand and has seen many women and children. Both English and French are interested to find that the language is similar to that spoken elsewhere in the Pacific. [231] 241

Again, in dealing with the state of the monuments and the way in which they were regarded, the impressions of the later observers differ greatly from those of Roggeveen. The Spaniards do not tell us very much. They saw from the sea what they thought were bushes symmetrically put up on the beach, and dotted about inland; later they found that they were in reality statues, and they wondered particularly how their crowns, which they observed were of a different material, were raised into place. It was one of the Spanish officers who states, as recorded at the beginning of this book, that the seashore was lined with stone. [197] 161 532

15:Routledge E-5 (1914-1915) 1919
OY2 Easter Islanders OY2

FIG. 86.



HOUSE FOR CHICKENS.

FIG. 87.



A TOWER USED BY FISHERMEN.

218]

[facing p. 218]

218 PRE-CHRISTIAN CULTURE

241 The food consisted of the usual tropical produce, such as
 262 potatoes, bananas, sugar-cane, and taro. Animal diet formed a
 [136] very small part of it, rats being the only form of mammal; but
 chickens played an important rôle in native life, and the remains
 of the dwellings made for them are much more imposing than
 those for human beings. They are solid cairns, in the centre of
 • [231] which was a chamber, running the greater part of their length;
 343] it was entered from outside by two or more narrow tunnels, down
 which the chickens could pass. They were placed here at night
 for the sake of safety, as it was impossible to remove the stones
 [226] in the dark without making a noise (fig. 86). Fish are not very
 438] plentiful, as there is no barrier reef, but they also were an article
 of diet, and were bartered by those on the coast for the vegetable
 products obtained by those further inland. Fish hooks made of
 226 stone were formerly used, and a legend tells of a man who had
 marvellous success because he used one made of human bone.
 The heroes of the tales are also spoken of as fishing with nets.
 There are in various places on the coast round towers, built of
 [343] stone, which are said to have been look-out towers whence
 watchers on land communicated the whereabouts of the fish to
 those at sea; these contained a small chamber below which was
 used as a sleeping apartment (fig. 87). Turtles appear on the
 carvings on the rock, and are alluded to in legend, and turtle-
 shell ornaments were worn; but the water is too cold for them
 ever to have been common, and Anakena is almost the only
 sandy bay where they could have come on shore.

291 The sole form of dress was the cloth made from the paper
 mulberry, and known throughout the South Seas as tapa; it
 [287] was used for loin-cloths and wraps, which the Spaniards describe
 as fastening over one shoulder. Head-gear was a very important
 point, as witnessed by the way the islanders always stole the
 caps of the various European sailors. The natives had various
 forms of crowns made of feathers, some of them reserved for
 special occasions. Cherished feathers, particularly those of
 white cocks, were brought out of gourds, where they had been
 carefully kept, to manufacture specimens for the Expedition.
 The crowns are generally made to form a shade over the eyes,
 like the head-dresses of the images. Naturally, every effort was
 made to find the prototype of the image hats. No one recollected
 ever seeing anything precisely like it, but among the pictures
 drawn for us of various head-decorations was a cylindrical hat

THE BIRD CULT

265

return they laid plentifully, and, as soon as the nestlings were hatched, the men of the celebrating clan carried them to the mainland, swimming with them in baskets bound round the forehead after the manner of the first egg. They were then taken in procession round the island, or, according to another account, only as far as Orohié. It was not until the piu had been obtained that it was permissible to eat the eggs, and they were then consumed by the subservient clans only, not by the Ao. The first two or three eggs, it was explained, were "given to God"; to eat them would prove fatal. Some of the young manu tara were kept in confinement till they were full grown, when a piece of red tapa was tied round the wing and leg, and they were told, "Kaho ki te hiva," "Go to the world outside." There was no objection to eating the young birds. The tara departed from Motu Nui about March, but a few stragglers remained; we saw one bird and obtained eggs at the beginning of July, but the natives failed to get any for us in August. When in the following spring the new bird-man had achieved his egg, he brought it to Orohié and was given the old one, which he buried in a gourd in a cranny of Raho Raraku; sometimes, however, it was thrown into the sea, or kept and buried with its original owner. The new man then took the place of his predecessor, who returned to ordinary life.

The last year that the Ao went to Orongo, which is known as "Rokunga," appears to have been 1866 or 1867. The names of twelve subsequent years are given, during which the competition for the egg continued, and it was still taken to be interred at Raraku. The cult thus survived in a mutilated form the conversion of the island to Christianity, which was completed in 1868; it is said that once the missionaries saw the Ao dancing with the egg outside their door in Hanga Roa and "told the people it was the Devil." It must have been celebrated even after the assembly of the remains of the clans into one place, which occurred about the same time, but it was finally crushed by the secular exploiters of the island, whose house at Mataveri, that of the present manager, rests on the foundation-stones of the cannibal habitation (fig. 25). The cult admittedly degenerated in later years. A new practice arose of having more than one bird-man, with other innovations. The request to be given the names of as many bird-years as could be remembered

796

[262]

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177